

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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NEW INTERIOR DEPARTMENT PUBLICATION ADDRESSES ASPECTS OF ECOLOGICAL BASELINE STUDIES

Ask a dozen different biologists, engineers, economists, and other professionals how to conduct an ecological "baseline" study and you're likely to get as many different answers.

The failure to agree on the definition, scope, content, methodology, and parameters of this new term that is currently in vogue among professionals and researchers conducting this type of study has led to widespread confusion and disagreement.

In its broadest sense, an ecological baseline study is essentially a measurement of the existing natural environment before any new development takes place. The scope of the study may range widely, from qualitative inventories conducted by natural resource managers to exhaustive quantitative studies of specific development sites by industry in order to comply with Federal and State regulations.

In an attempt to clear up some of the problems surrounding use of the term "ecological baseline study," the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has prepared a 388-page report entitled "A Systems Approach to Ecological Baseline Studies."

The report, prepared under contract for the Service's Western Energy and Land Use Team in Fort Collins, Colorado, is a collation of information from over 200 scientists and from existing publications. It presents a recommended approach in a step-by-step format on how to organize, conduct, and interpret baseline studies.

The results of such studies provide reference "baselines" from which environmental scientists can predict the effects of proposed actions and recommend alternatives, define appropriate mitigation measures, and design future monitoring programs.

The confusion surrounding application of the term stems largely from the fact that "baseline" has been popularly used with different meanings, without ever having been defined in legislation that mandated the collection of baseline data.

"A Systems Approach to Ecological Baseline Studies" is primarily intended for use by industrial managers and agency administrators and their field staffs, although it can be of use to anyone involved in natural resource development. Information and processes in the report are described mainly in general terms, but specific examples are also included.

Copies of this report may be obtained from the Technical Information Officer, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2625 Redwing Road, Fort Collins, Colorado 80526 (specify report # FWS/OBS-78/21 in requests).